

My name is Zoe Steinfield. I live at 427 W Hillsdale, in Lansing.

Thank you for letting me speak this morning, and thank you for holding this hearing on an inclusive amendment to the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act. This is such an important conversation to have, and I'm grateful to be allowed to talk a little bit about why updating the bill to protect gender identity and gender expression would be so helpful to me.

I am a transgender woman, and I'm currently seeking employment. This is a daunting task for me, because it's highly unlikely that I can make it through an application and interview process without being outed as transgender at some point. And once that happens, my ability to get a job no longer depends solely on my education, experience, responsibility, and people skills. At that point my chances of finding work are also subject to the personal biases of the employer and whether they happen to disagree with the health care recommended for me by the medical establishment of this country.

I'm a college educated woman who graduated with honor, but since then I've been consistently underemployed and passed over for advancement. I came out to my boss and transitioned to living as a woman while working at a retail job I'd had since college. At this store, every single other employee working with me was eventually promoted to manager, including new hires who started years after I transitioned there. It was humiliating, it was only because of my employer's negative attitude toward my being trans. At my other job, I was a temp office worker at a place that was supposedly friendly toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. In fact, I started as an unpaid intern there in the hopes that it would be a safe place for me to work. But I recently learned that my boss had been saying derogatory, disrespectful things about my being transgender behind my back – saying I was “really a guy,” calling me “he,” and when corrected, calling me “she” in a sarcastic tone of voice. It created hostility and tension between us until I was eventually made so uncomfortable that I had to leave.

Now I'm looking for work, but don't know if I'll be able to find anything. I don't know if I'm going to be able to pay my rent. I might need to move back in with my parents. I'm worried if I don't find something soon the gap in my employment history is going to make me look like a poor hire when I apply to jobs down the road. I'm anxious about my future.

I want us to get to a place as a state where I can finally just go to my job, work hard, pay my taxes and pursue my happiness without the judgments of others impeding my ability to do so. I want to be free from discrimination on the basis of my gender identity and gender expression. This fully inclusive amendment to ELCRA would send a message to employers statewide that we are all Michiganders and we all deserve the same rights and opportunity under the law. Thank you so much for bringing us together today so we can hopefully make that happen.